

1 **"APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR THE REMOVAL OF**
2 **MOISTURE AND MISTS FROM GAS FLOWS"**

3
4 CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

5 This application claims priority of US Provisional Patent Application
6 Serial No. 60/445,450, filed on February 7, 2003, the entirety of which is
7 incorporated herein by reference.

8
9 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The invention relates generally to apparatus for removing small
11 amounts of liquids from a gas stream. More particularly, cyclonic operation aids in
12 the removal of moisture from compressed air and moisture and mists from gas
13 streams such as wellhead gas effluent.

14
15 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

16 Downstream condensation and formation of hydrates can be a serious
17 problem in gas processing. Liquids include water vapor (moisture) and liquid
18 hydrocarbon mist. In some cases, simple centrifugal separator vessels are
19 implemented which are capable of gross removal but result in substantial moisture
20 or liquid re-entrainment. Dehydrators are applied for the removal of water vapor
21 from hydrocarbon gas streams. Dehydrators, such as those implementing glycol,
22 are capable of greater moisture removal, however they are also associated with a
23 large cost and negative environmental impact including a large energy cost
24 associated with heating to separate water and glycol and the exhaust emissions.

1 Applicant has determined that there is a novel approach to the
2 removal of liquids which demonstrates improved efficiency without the need for
3 additional energy consumption and emissions.

4 5 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

6 Methodology and apparatus are applied for the removal of liquids from
7 gas streams including compressed air and gas from gas wells.

8 Apparatus is provided for better capturing centrifugally-liberated liquid
9 from such gas streams so as to prevent re-entrainment and thereby achieve greater
10 removal. In one embodiment, the present invention comprises components for a
11 cyclonic vessel. The components can be conveniently provided as an insert to a
12 manufactured vessel or as a retrofit to an existing vessel.

13 In one form of the present invention, a tangential gas inlet imparts a
14 cyclonic spin to incoming wet gas. A plurality of concentric shells are placed
15 adjacent the gas outlet at the discharge of the cyclonic vessel for capturing
16 separated liquids before re-entrainment. Liquid collects in annular cavities for
17 draining out of the vessel. Helical vanes can be added for enhancing or maintaining
18 the spinning of the gas stream. In low moisture conditions, the shells can be
19 supplemented with an annular layer of high surface area contacting material at the
20 vessel wall.

21 In a broad embodiment, apparatus for treating a gas stream
22 containing liquid is adapted to a vessel having cylindrical side walls, a bottom end,
23 and a tangential gas inlet adjacent a top end. The apparatus comprises: a base

1 plate positioned below the tangential gas inlet; at one least cylindrical shell arranged
2 on the base plate and adjacent the wall portion for forming at least one annular
3 cavity extending upwardly from the base plate and having an open upper end for
4 receiving liquid therein; an opening in the base plate at each annular cavity for
5 draining liquid from the at least one annular cavity; an outlet for the gas stream
6 positioned adjacent the base plate and within the annular shells; and a plate above
7 the gas outlet for directing the gas stream over the one or more annular cavities
8 before the gas stream is removed through the gas outlet.

9 Preferably the base plate and shells are includes as part of an insert
10 installed into a sectional vessel having a tangential gas inlet.

1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

2 Figure 1 is a substantially conventional prior art surge vessel for
3 primary separation of wet gas from solids;

4 Figure 2a is a cross-sectional view of a separator according to one
5 embodiment of the invention which illustrates a separation insert installed in a gas
6 processing vessel. An optional annular blanket is only shown partially to improve
7 clarity of the other components;

8 Figure 2b is a cross sectional view of the insert of Fig. 2a, illustrated
9 isolated from the vessel prior to insertion into the vessel and having optional helical
10 vanes thereon for spinning the downcoming wet gas stream. The optional mist pad
11 has been omitted for clarity;

12 Figures 3a and 3b are side and top cross-sectional views respectively
13 of a top portion of the vessel of Fig. 2a illustrating the dry gas discharge conduit, dry
14 gas exit, the tangential wet gas inlet, and the top of the vessel being flanged for
15 enabling installation and maintenance of the insert of Fig. 2b as required;

16 Figures 4a and 4b are cross-sectional views of the base of the vessel
17 of Fig. 2a and illustrating a side and a top views respectively of the concentric shells
18 section and the dry gas discharge conduit;

19 Figure 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the
20 concentric shells section and the dry gas discharge conduit; and

21 Figure 6 is a cross-sectional view of a separator according to another
22 embodiment of the invention which illustrates cyclone separation apparatus having
23 a lower end gas outlet from the vessel.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

One embodiment of the separator 20 is shown in Figs. 2a – 4b. The separator 20 is particularly well adapted to treatment of wellhead gas streams containing hydrocarbon mists and moisture. Typically, the incoming gas stream is initially and conventionally treated in a surge separator 10 (Fig. 1) where gross removal of impurities and solids from the wet gas stream is required.

The wet gas stream containing liquid is then directed tangentially through one or more separators 20 of the present invention.

Each separator 20 comprises a cylindrical vessel 21 having a top end 22, a bottom end 23 and side walls 25. As shown in Figs. 3a and 3b, a tangential gas inlet 24 is fit to the top end 22 for imparting cyclonic action to the incoming wet gas stream.

A base plate 29, spaced downstream and below the tangential gas inlet 24, divides the vessel 21 into a cyclonic upper separation section G and a lower liquid storage section L.

The upper separation section G comprises a centrifugal or cyclonic section C above a liquid trapping section T. The wet gas stream travels downwardly through the upper separation section G from the gas inlet 24 in a spinning motion towards the bottom end 23 of the vessel 21 and base plate 29. Liquid contained therein concentrates adjacent the side walls 25. As necessary, the spinning motion of the gas stream is further encouraged using one or more helical vanes 26 spaced along the cyclonic section C.

1 Optionally, and typically where liquid loading is light, a thin layer or
2 annular blanket 50 of high surface area contacting material or packing 51, such as
3 felt, resides adjacent the side walls 25 for capturing released liquid and conducting
4 the liquid to the liquid trapping section T. The blanket 50 extends upwardly from the
5 liquid trapping section T and along the vessel side walls 25. The packing 51 is
6 retained adjacent the vessel side wall by a mesh frame 52 which enables maximal
7 communication between the wet gas stream and the packing. Cyclonic action
8 engages the majority of moisture and mists with the annular packing 51 which then
9 drains down the packing to the liquid trapping section T. The mesh frame 52 can be
10 suspended from the helical vanes 26 or additionally upon the liquid trapping section
11 T.

12 The liquid trapping section T comprises one or more cylindrical shells
13 42,42 ... which extend upwardly from the base plate 29 and which are spaced from
14 each other 42,42 and can also be spaced from the side walls 25 for forming one or
15 more annular cavities 43 therebetween. A substantially dry gas entrance 31 is
16 located generally centrally and adjacent the base plate 29. The dry gas entrance 31
17 is shielded from the upper separation section G by a laterally extending barrier or
18 deflector 40 having gas flow bypass 41 formed about its periphery. The deflector 40
19 maximizes exposure of the gas stream and separated liquids remain outwardly and
20 maximally exposed to the annular cavities 42,42 ... before a substantially dry gas is
21 re-directed radially inwardly to the dry gas entrance.

22 The shells 42 are spaced from the vessel side walls 25 and from one
23 another 42,42,42 ..., each of the one or more shells 42 being arranged successively

1 from an outermost shell adjacent the vessel's side walls 25 to an innermost shell
2 spaced from the gas inlet 31. As stated, the cyclonic action concentrates liquids
3 from the gas stream radially outwards towards the vessel's side walls 25. Liquids
4 adjacent the vessel side walls 25, and those which may diminish in a gradient
5 radially inward, are captured in the successive annular cavities 43,43

6 In embodiment applied in operation on light loadings, few shells 42 are
7 required. For the treatment of moist air, one may use a solitary cylindrical shell
8 forming a single annular cavity between the side walls 25 and the shell 42.

9 In another the embodiment, as shown, each successively and radially
10 inwardly spaced shell 42, having an ever decreasing radius, has a corresponding
11 diminishing height. Accordingly a gas stream, having released much of its liquid
12 content, approaches the gas outlet 31 and is more-and-more constricted radially by
13 a conical and reducing vessel volume, the gas stream traversing each annular
14 cavity 43 for additional liquid capture therein and wherein a drier gas stream results
15 with is discharged through the gas outlet 31 and out of the vessel.

16 In one embodiment shown in Fig. 2a, a discharge conduit 30 extends
17 out of the top end 22 of the vessel 21 such as for transfer of the drier gas stream to
18 additional stages of separators 20 or collection. The discharge conduit 30 extends
19 along the axis of the vessel 21 between a bottom end 33 at the gas outlet 31
20 adjacent the base plate 29 and a top end 32 at the vessel's top end 22. In another
21 embodiment shown in Fig. 6, the drier gas stream is discharged from the bottom
22 end 23 of the vessel 21. In this case the discharge conduit 30 is directed

1 downwardly. If helical vanes are employed, a dummy support member 35 extends
2 upwardly from the liquid trapping section T.

3 Various embodiments of the shells 42 are shown in Figs. 4a,4b and in
4 Fig. 5. As shown in Figs. 4a and 4b, each shell 42 extends upwards from the base
5 plate 29. Typically, the shells 42 would be nested concentrically. Each annular
6 cavity 43 is formed between each adjacent pair of shells 42 and has an open end.
7 In one aspect, the annular cavities 43 result in a quieting of the gas stream and
8 permit the centrifugally separated liquids to fall-out of suspension and avoid re-
9 entrainment. As the separation of liquids by centrifugal force is a continuum,
10 occurring at a maximum at the vessel side 25 wall and a minimum at the central
11 axis, the series of shells 42,42 and annular cavities 25,43 and 43,43 collect liquid
12 from a plurality of radial locations in the spinning gas stream. The base plate 29
13 adjacent each annular cavities 43 is fit with a plurality of drain holes 45 to enable
14 the emptying of each cavities into the liquid collection section L below the shells 42
15 and base plate 29.

16 With reference to Fig. 5, an alternate embodiment of the gas outlet 31
17 is shown. The deflector 40 is incorporated into a sump affixed to the base plate 29.
18 A plurality of entrances 55 are formed in the sump, below the deflector 40. An
19 variation on the number of cylindrical shells is also illustrated, having three
20 concentric shells 42,42,42 and having spacer elements 56 between the vessel 21
21 and between adjacent shells 42,42.

22 The separator of the present invention can be manufactured as a
23 component of a custom vessel or a retrofit to an existing vessel 21. With reference

1 to Fig. 2b, the base plate 29, concentric shells 42,42, and discharge conduit 30 can
2 be fabricated as an insert 49 for installation into a typical gas processing vessel
3 having a tangential gas inlet 24. The base plate 29 is supported from the bottom
4 end 33 of the discharge conduit 30. Further, as shown only in Fig. 2a, the helical
5 vanes 26 and mesh 50 can be manufactured as part of the insert 49. A vessel 21
6 can include a connection 60 between the top end 22 and the bottom end 23 which
7 enables opening the vessel 21 for installation of the insert 49. Typically, for
8 pressure vessels, a flanged connection 61 can be employed. Further, connection
9 60 enables insertion of an additional cylindrical spool (not shown) which can be
10 provided as desired to increase separation distance above the base plate 29.

11 Accordingly, one can retrofit an approved or regulated vessel with the
12 apparatus of the invention without a need for manufacture of a custom vessel which
13 may require re-certification.

14 With reference to Fig. 2a, the illustrated separator is suitable for
15 ASME code up to 1440 psi service and was designed for processing up to 6 million
16 cubic feet of natural gas per day and has the following specifications: 12 inch inside
17 diameter pipe having hemispherical heads for an overall height of about 10 feet. As
18 shown, five cylindrical shells of 12 gauge material have the following diameters
19 spaced sequentially from the side walls: 11, 10, 9, 8, and 6 inch. Each shell
20 42,42,42,42,42 has a different height measured from the base plate 26,
21 respectively: 16, 14, 12, 10, and 8 inches. A seven inch diameter deflector plate 40
22 is supported on a 2 inch discharge conduit 30. The gas outlet 31 can be formed of
23 approximately forty-eight 3/8 inch holes drilled in the discharge conduit 30 adjacent

1 the base plate 29. An annular blanket 50 is formed of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of felt 51 supported in
2 a 20 gauge expanded metal mesh frame 52. A plurality of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch drain holes 45
3 were provided along radial quadrants in the base plate 29 outside the outermost of
4 the shells 42, between each shell 42,42 and inside the innermost of the shells 42.
5

1 EXAMPLES

2 A smaller yet similarly proportioned separator according to Fig. 2a,
3 was tested for removing air from compressed air. Such a separator, being 7 foot tall
4 and 6-5/8 inch diameter was tested on 185 scfm air at 100 psig. Only one shell
5 adjacent the side walls was utilized and a felt annular blanket was installed.
6 Ambient air at 43 F and 74-82 % humidity was compressed to 100 psig and 84 F
7 and treated through the separator. A drier gas stream exited the vessel at 5 %
8 relative humidity and 55 F. The liquid recovery was 29 ounces in 2 hours.

9 In another test on the same unit, drier ambient air was tested with the
10 addition of supplementary water. Ambient air at 56 F and 54 % humidity was
11 compressed to 100 psig and 90 F. Over a two hour period, 72 ounces of water
12 were added to the compressed gas stream and treated through the separator. The
13 liquid recovery was 98 ounces in 2 hours or a recovery of 26 ounces from the air
14 stream. A drier gas stream exited the vessel at 65 F.

15 Application of the apparatus and methodology disclosed herein results
16 in significant savings over known dehydrator technology.

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